



THE HISTORY OF THE

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TWO DISCOURSES

UPON THE

TRIAL OF THE SPIRITS.

SERMON THE FIRST;

PREACHED AT

THE PARISH CHURCH OF UPPER CHELSEA.

BY THE

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RECTOR;

LATE FELLOW OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AND CHAPLAIN
TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RICHMOND.

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P R E F A C E.

IN publishing the accompanying Sermon, the Author trusts that he has been guided by a desire for the spiritual welfare of those committed to his charge. More conclusive arguments against the delusions at present existing in the Church may, he is well aware, be found in many larger and more elaborate treatises, especially in that of the Rev. W. Goode,* to whose admirable work the Author begs most distinctly to acknowledge his obligations, and

* Modern Claims to the Gifts of the Spirit.
Hatchard, 10s. 6d. boards.

from which the quotations from the Fathers are derived. But the very nature of such works, the depth of research, and the profundity of their arguments, render them little accessible to the members of a mixed congregation. In these days of religious inquiry, and more especially at the present moment in this parish, it is desirable to have something plain and popular which may be put into the hands of all, whose minds have been exercised, or their opinions influenced, by the pretension to the extraordinary influences of the Divine Spirit at present in the Church. Whether these Discourses shall be permitted to answer this purpose, the Author would desire to leave, with fervent prayer for the promised blessing, to the decision of Him, “without whom neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth,” and who alone

“giveth the increase.” Of this, the Author trusts he may speak with some degree of confidence, that his desire has been, while directing the judgments of many, to injure the feelings of none: he most sincerely respects the character, and he most truly loves the persons of some, from whom he is compelled to differ; and his heart’s desire and prayer is, that they may be led to acknowledge their error, and to retrace their steps. With feelings such as these, he would not willingly pen one line which should give them pain; but at the same time, so deeply rooted is his conviction of the danger and unscripturalness of their views, that he dare not withhold one word which should tend to expose the fallacy of their pretensions, or to warn away the members of his flock from the dangers of their delusions.

The Author will only add, that his conviction of the unprofitableness of religious controversy is so complete, that, having performed what he has felt to be both a necessary duty as regards his people, and a painful one as regards himself, he believes that no notice that can be taken of these Discourses will ever tempt him to enter the lists of controversy, or to engage in theological war, with those with whom, if he cannot cordially agree, he will never willingly contend.

A SERMON.

1 JOHN IV. 1.

“BELOVED, BELIEVE NOT EVERY SPIRIT, BUT TRY THE SPIRITS WHETHER THEY ARE OF GOD.”

IN applying ourselves to the deeply important subject which late events have compelled us to notice from this place, I would desire for us all a spirit of humility and affection, as well as of wisdom, of sincerity, and of knowledge.

By the subject upon which we are about to enter, the hearts of many of the most sincere and devoted among the people of God have been painfully exercised, dissension has been introduced into truly Christian families, religious intercourse among relatives, if not entirely put a stop

to, has been rendered cold and formal and uninteresting, and a scene of confusion and schism has taken place in the Church of the Redeemer, which it is impossible to witness without the most heart-rending feelings of sympathy and regret.

These considerations alone should induce us to exercise great tenderness, as well as great caution in our investigation; and while looking up to the Holy Spirit at every step, for instruction and guidance, looking around also at every step, upon our erring brethren, lest we pain or condemn those who may, in many of the graces of a Christian life and conversation, have attained to a far greater eminency than ourselves.

While, however, we give the fullest weight to this consideration, there is still another which must not be stinted of its proper measure of importance, or deprived of any part of its just and legitimate demands upon us, viz., the imperative duty on all subjects connected with the glory

of God and the salvation of our souls, of ascertaining the plain and simple *truth*, as the Holy Spirit of God has seen fit to reveal it in the inspired Word; and having so ascertained it, to suffer no feelings of personal regard, no questions of self-interest to interfere with us in declaring it honestly and boldly, that we may not handle the Word of God deceitfully, and that the “trumpet may not give an uncertain sound.”

We shall, then, proceed, taking the words of the text as our authority and our command, to endeavour to fulfil its injunction: “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God.” You will observe that the very command itself implies two things, that there *are* spirits by which men are influenced which are *not of God*, and that it is in the power of every Christian, with the promised aid of God the Holy Ghost, to ascertain in each individual case whether the spirit be of God or be not of God.

Unless these be granted, the command would be unintelligible. Believing, then, that we are attempting to fulfil an acknowledged duty, and one in which, if we sincerely seek it, we shall not be left without aid sufficient and light sufficient to accomplish our purpose, let us begin by examining, in the present case, what appearance has been assumed by those spirits which we are called upon to try. Certain persons have arisen in the Church, professing to speak as the prophets of old, under the immediate directions of the Holy Ghost, by whose inspiration they are made to utter warnings to the Church of Christ, to predict, in some cases, future events, and in all to speak the words of God himself, from which there is to be no appeal to the written Word, but which are to be received implicitly as the declarations of God the Holy Ghost. This they denominate the gift of prophecy, not meaning to limit the phrase to *predicting*, but to speaking upon any subject under

the immediate inspiration of the Most High,—every word, spoken as they term it in “*the power*,” having all the unquestionable authority of words spoken from the lips of Deity,—in fact, to all intents and purposes, a new revelation. These pretensions, whether true or false, having found adherents in the Church of England, not only among some of the most pious of its laity, but even among its ministers themselves, it becomes the bounden duty of every Christian to inquire whether they are grounded in the truth of God, or whether they are the offspring of fanaticism and error.

We shall proceed, then, to the trial of these spirits by three different tests.

I. By the written Word of God.

II. By the experience of the Church of God.

III. By their own professions.

Concluding, By endeavouring to answer some difficulties which have arisen in the minds of many candid inquirers into this deeply important subject.

I. First, then, we shall try the spirits by the revealed Word of our God, in compliance with his command to the Prophet Isaiah under no very dissimilar circumstances, viz. : “ To the law and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The great argument from Scripture in favour of the truth of their pretensions, which the persons to whom we allude have continually advanced, is this,—that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit of God were promised by our Lord to his disciples, and, after them, to all true believers to the end of time,—that wherever there is such a faith as the Word of God commands, there will be found the extraordinary, or miraculous gifts of the Spirit,—that they are the birthright of the Church,—that she is responsible for them,—and that nothing but the present dead, and cold, and indifferent state of the Church can account for their absence ;

and all this they ground chiefly* upon the following remarkable words of our Lord to his disciples after his resurrection: "These signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."†

The first point, then, upon which we join issue with the persons of whom we speak, is this, They explain this passage as a promise of Christ to his people throughout all time, "These signs *shall*

* The Author does not think it necessary to allude to the often quoted promise of Joel, chap. ii. 28, 29, because the Holy Ghost having declared, in Acts ii. 16, that it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, before it can be available in the present case, it must not merely be asserted but *proved*, that this promise is to receive a double accomplishment.

† Mark xvi. 17, 18.

follow them that believe." Yes, say they, shall at all times, and throughout all ages, follow them, for there is no limitation. We acknowledge that there is no limitation actually expressed in the words before us, but we contend that there is one implied. For if not, if, because there is no limitation of *time* expressed, we are to believe that there is no limitation of time implied, then must this be equally true with regard to *persons*, and we must understand that the promise means that these signs shall at all times follow all persons who believe; yes, *every individual* who believes to the saving of his soul. There is no escape from this conclusion, for the promise is no more limited as to *persons*, than as to *times*; it says simply, "These signs shall follow them that believe," and they who plead for its extension to all the *periods* of the Church, cannot consistently disallow that it extends to all the *persons* in the Church.

Yet it is evident from Holy Writ, that

this never was the case; that even in the days of the apostles themselves, many of their own converts, although abundantly partakers of the ordinary gifts of the Spirit, were not in every case partakers of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. In proof of this, let us refer to a passage often quoted by those to whom I allude, as favourable to their views of this question, viz., the miraculous conversion of the three thousand persons on the day of Pentecost, in the second chapter of the Acts. St. Peter there expressly tells his hearers, that if they repent and are baptised in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, they “shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” By God’s grace three thousand persons accepted the Gospel invitation, and gladly received his word, and were baptised, and no doubt were made partakers of the promised “gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Having stated this, the Evangelist proceeds to describe the effects of this “gift

of the Holy Ghost" upon the new converts. We shall, therefore, in this description, trace, without much difficulty, by its visible effects, the *nature* of this gift. "They continued," says the Apostle in the 42d verse of the chapter, "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." You will observe there is not one syllable to lead us to imagine that they had received any miraculous gifts of any sort or kind. And, surely, if they had received such an astonishing gift, the Apostle could not in such a passage have been silent upon it. They had been promised, and they had received the "gift of the Holy Ghost;" and how was this manifested? He assures us, that from ignorant heathens, they became enlightened Christians. He even thinks proper to state that they not only received the apostles' doctrine, but continued stedfastly in it, and in partaking of the Christians' sacra-

ments, and of the Christians' prayers; he, therefore, evidently alludes, not only to the immediate effect of that gift, but to its influence upon their after-life. Now, I would ask, is it possible, that in so minute a description, the Evangelist could have omitted that, which, if true, would have been by far the most remarkable feature in the change which had taken place? could he have failed to have added, "They healed the sick, spake with tongues, prophesied, cast out devils, raised the dead, and did many wonderful works"?

Surely, had this been true of the three thousand real converts of the day of Pentecost, the Apostle could not have omitted every allusion to it. No! the very omission appears to be proof most full and most convincing, that the only reason why he did not mention it, was because he could not mention it. That "the gift of the Holy Ghost," which all, without exception received, and from which no true believer

has ever been debarred, was that Spirit of adoption, that converting, guiding, sanctifying grace, which is bestowed indiscriminately upon all the members of the family of our heavenly Father.

But if this negative testimony be so conclusive, how much is it corroborated by the verse which follows. The Evangelist continues, “Fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done”—by whom? by the three thousand? no! but “by the apostles.” Now, had these miracles been performed; had those extraordinary gifts been shared by all the new converts as well as by the apostles, is it probable that the evangelist, in his description of the lives of these new converts, would have turned aside to introduce, almost parenthetically, the names of “*the apostles*” alone, as the workers of these wonders and signs?*

* There is no doubt, that on other occasions, as for instance, to the Gentile converts at the house of Cornelius, Acts x. 46, and to St. Paul’s twelve converts

stood alone, it would be better than a thousand arguments, to prove that the exposition of the passage in St. Mark, given in all ages by the Church, is the true one ; viz., that the promise of the Saviour was limited both as to time and as to persons ; that it extended to many, certainly not to all true believers in the days of the apostles, and that it continued, probably two centuries in the Church, until the great work of firmly establishing the cross upon the ruins of heathenism was effected, when this miraculous aid was withdrawn, because the necessities of the infant Church no longer rendered it indispensable.

I said that if this argument stood alone,

at Ephesus, Acts xix. 6, “ the gift of the Holy Ghost ” was accompanied by the gift of miraculous powers, but the very fact that it is there *stated* to have been so accompanied, only strengthens the probability that on the day of Pentecost it was not so accompanied, and therefore tends to prove what we desire to establish.

it would be unanswerable : but it does not stand alone—far, very far from it. For instance. They who maintain, from the passage in St. Mark already quoted, that the promise is universal, and that all who believe, ought to be enabled to perform these wonderful works, should, if consistent, assert also, that all who believe, ought to be able to perform *all* these wonderful works ; for it does not promise that they “ shall speak with new tongues ;” *or* “ take up serpents ;” *or* “ drink any deadly thing,” but “ *and*” do each of these wonderful acts ; therefore, if their mode of interpretation be correct, every believer should be able to perform every miracle which is here promised,—a power which we have no certain knowledge was ever possessed by any individual, our blessed Lord alone excepted, since the world began.

Before leaving this part of our subject, I would offer yet another argument, which appears to possess the greatest weight.

Acknowledge, for a moment, that the promise of miraculous gifts had been as these persons pretend, the daily heritage of the Church throughout the last eighteen centuries. Then what must we also acknowledge? We must believe that, during fifteen centuries, God has never seen fit to bestow such a proportion of Faith upon any individual in his Church as would be sufficient for his enjoyment of these promised gifts. Is this analogous to any other of God's dealings with his people? Can these persons, can any body, point out an instance of any ordinary promise of God, by which I mean a promise intended for all times, equivalent to which, God has not in some, yea, in many cases, in every generation of Christians, given faith to embrace and to profit by it? Take, for example, the simple and beautiful promise given in the tenth chapter of Romans: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead,

thou shalt be saved." Now here is a promise as entirely beyond the grasp of every child of Adam, unless He who gives the promise gives also faith to receive, to appreciate, and, therefore, to enjoy it, as the promise of power to heal the sick, or to cast out devils. And yet there has never been one humble sincere follower of the Lord Jesus Christ during these eighteen centuries who has sought faith sufficient to act upon this promise and has not found it. Whence is this? Simply because a merciful God would not so mock his people as to propose to them a promise, intended for all times and all persons, without, of his goodness, as freely bestowing power for its fulfilment. How, then, can we reconcile this with the fact that, as regards the promise of extraordinary gifts, no such faith has been bestowed, no such power been given? Simply by believing, what appears quite undeniable, that such gifts were never made the objects of an ordinary promise, were never intended to

extend beyond that period, during which, faith sufficient to embrace the promise and to inherit the gifts, was bestowed upon very many of the members of the infant and struggling Church. If otherwise, if we must believe that this was an ordinary promise of God, can we imagine that there never should have been one of the holy army of martyrs, never one of the blessed followers of the apostles, after the two first centuries, never, again, one of the reformers who should have received faith sufficient for its fulfilment, or have been enabled to speak one word in "the power," which is now supposed to be possessed by men, and women, and children in our streets? O, truly, the absurdity of such a notion is so palpable, that we are almost led to doubt that the devil, that cunning spirit, could have any hand in weaving a web of so slight and frail a texture; and, indeed, had not its meshes been of sufficient strength to have taken and secured some of whom we had hoped better

things, we never could have attributed so feeble a work to so artful and so powerful an agent.

But some will reply to this argument, of none of the people of God having been so gifted during 1500 years, that it is founded upon a mistake in facts, that such men have continually risen up, but that their testimony has been refused, their evidence suppressed, their wonderful works overlooked or disbelieved. This then leads us to the second head of our inquiry.

II. We proceed to try the pretensions of those of whom we speak by the experience of the Church.

Let us first examine the opinions of two of those holy men who adorned the Church of the Redeemer at the close of the fourth and during the early years of the fifth century, St. Chrysostom and St. Augustine, that we may see how far even in those days, probably of far greater spirituality than the present, there was any the remotest idea, that the extraordinary

gifts of the Holy Spirit either were, or ought to have been, at that time enjoyed by the Church.

We will take first the testimony of Chrysostom. These are his decisive words. "Of miraculous powers *not even a vestige is left.*"* And again: "So then to seek after miracles is the part of the tempters of Christ both then and now. For there are also, even now, those who seek for them, and say, Why are there no miracles now? Because, if your faith is what it ought to be, and you love Christ as you ought to love him, you have no need of miracles. For these things are given to unbelievers;"† i. e., for the benefit of unbelievers. I need hardly beg you to remark the contrast between the opinion of Chrysostom with those of whom we are speaking; they, considering extraordinary gifts a proof of great faith—he, on the

* De Sacerd. lib. iv. Op. ed. Sav. vol. vi. p. 35.

† Chrysost. Hom. 24, in Johann. c. ii. v. 25. Op. ed. Sav. v. ii. p. 650.

contrary, stating, that if our faith were what it ought to be, we should neither need nor desire such gifts.

But let us turn to Augustine, one of the holiest and most faithful of the followers of our Lord. Did he work miracles? Did he speak in "the power"? Did he believe the gifts to be the heritage of the Church, and for which she was responsible? Let him answer for himself. "In the primitive times," he says, "the Holy Spirit fell upon believers, and they spoke in tongues which they had not learnt, as the Spirit gave them utterance. *These were signs suitable to the time.* For it was right that the Holy Spirit should be thus borne witness of in all tongues, because the Gospel of God was about to travel through all tongues throughout the world. That testimony being given, *it passed away.*"* And again, "Is the Holy Spirit, then, brethren, not given now?"

* August. in Ev. Johann. c. 4. Tract 6, § 10. Ed. Nen. tom. iii. p. 2, col. 868.

Whoever thinks this, is not worthy to receive it. It *is* given now. Why, then, does no one speak in the tongues of all nations, as he spake who was then filled with the Holy Spirit? Why? Because that which was signified by it is fulfilled. What was then promised is now fulfilled. Let no one, therefore, say, I have received the Holy Spirit; why do not I speak in the tongues of all nations? If you would live by the Holy Spirit, hold fast Christian love, adhere to the truth, seek to promote unity, that you may attain eternal life.”* What a remarkable contrast do the obviously Scriptural views, the plain and practical good sense of this holy and most highly talented man, form to the fancies of those who profess to take a far higher stand, and would have us believe that all these Christian graces are as nothing, unless we are still earnestly coveting those gifts which God has long since seen fit to withdraw.

* Serm. 267. Ed. Bene d. tom. v., col. 1089, 1090.

But let us take another authority, about an hundred and fifty years later than the above, to ascertain whether these same opinions still kept their ground in the Church of God. We find then Isidore of Seville speaking thus at the latter end of the sixth century :—" The reason why the Church does not now do the miracles it did under the apostles, is because miracles were necessary then to convince the world of the truth of Christianity; but now it becomes it, being so convinced, to shine forth in good works. Whoever seeks to perform miracles now as a believer, seeks after vain glory and human applause. For it is written, ' Tongues are a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.' Observe, a tongue is not necessary for believers who have already received the faith, but for unbelievers, that they may be converted. For Paul miraculously cured the father of Publius of a fever, for the benefit of unbelievers : but he restores believing

Timothy, when ill, not by prayer, but by medicine, so that you may clearly perceive that miracles were wrought for unbelievers and not for believers.”*

We might thus proceed throughout all the different generations of the people of God, and bring from the writings of the holiest and the most faithful of them, similar testimonies to the view which we have endeavoured to take of the cessation of gifts in the Church of God. But it is unnecessary.† Sufficient has, we trust, been

* Isid. Hispal. Sententiarum, lib. i. c. 27. Ed. Col. Agripp. 1617, p. 424.

† To bring one more testimony from a writer of a very different age of the Church, but surpassed by few of any age in piety and true holiness:—“ Why did not Christ continue this communication of the Holy Ghost to his Church still, seeing our unbelief is strong, and we have still need of such help as well as they? Answer. We have the full use and benefit of the Holy Ghost which was given them, that seal that was then set to the Christian doctrine and Scriptures stands there still: When Christ hath fully proved to the world the truth of his relationship, office, and doctrine, must he still continue the same

said upon this point to convince the unprejudiced and candid inquirer; with respect to others, prayer may, and we trust will avail, but argument is hopeless; for where we find one person who is already established in an opinion, driven out of his imaginary stronghold by argument, we find many who are only confirmed, the more decidedly and rooted the more hopelessly.

Intending to defer the conclusion of this important subject to the next season of addressing you, I would only add, as a caution rendered needful by the natural tendency of the human mind, Be watchful over yourselves with a godly jealousy, in thinking and speaking of those who have been led astray, by what we cannot hesitate to call a spirit of delusion, “deceiving and being deceived.”* Remember,

actions? Is it not enough, that he sealed it up once, but must he set a new seal for every man that requireth it in every age?”—*The Spirit's Witness to the Truth of Christianity; Richard Baxter's Practical Works*, vol. xx. p. 21. Edit. 1833.

* 2 Tim. iii. 13.

that many among them are, doubtless, also among "God's dear children;"* despise them not, therefore, neither be bitter against them; but while you abjure their errors, and separate yourselves, as you are bound to do, both privately and publicly, from their teaching, not suffering yourselves, even from motives of curiosity, to wander within the sound of such dangerous delusions, continue to love and to pray for them, that the veil may be taken away from their hearts, and that, in the expressive language of Scripture, they may again "come to themselves."† Remember, also, that while you plainly see the error into which they have fallen, by seeking those extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost which God denies, you do not yourselves fall into an error of the opposite extreme, by neglecting to seek those ordinary gifts of the same Spirit which God so freely proffers.

God's ordinary promise is to every one

* Ephes. v. 1.

† Luke xv. 17.

of his children “the earnest of the Spirit.”* Without this you cannot even say, that “Jesus is the Lord;”† without this you cannot offer a single acceptable prayer;‡ without this, in short, you are not, and you cannot be a Christian; for it is the very stamp which authenticates the child of God, that he has the impress of the image of God, by being partaker of the Spirit of God.§

For the enjoyment of this promise, faith sufficient is always to be obtained; if you feel the want of it, “seek, and you shall find,” “ask, and you shall have.” The fondest father may deny a wanton child who asks for bread only to play with, or to cast beneath his feet, but never yet denied the starving child, whose very life depended on his father’s answer. God may, and assuredly does deny gifts, which in these days might be sought, only to gratify the ambition or the vanity of the

* 2 Cor. i. 22. v. 5.

† 1 Cor. xii. 3.

‡ Rom. viii. 26.

§ Rom. viii. 9.

possessor; but He never has and never will deny those gifts of knowledge, and love, and faith, and patience, and zeal, and holiness, which are as needful to the spiritual life of the soul, as the air we breathe or the bread with which we are nourished are to the natural life of the body.

Our Saviour has Himself declared that, at the last day, "Many shall say, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" to whom he will reply, "I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity."* But not an individual shall say upon that great and coming day, Lord, Lord, have I not trusted in thy salvation, and fled to thy blood alone for pardon and for peace? without hearing in return that blessed answer, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."†

* Matt. vii. 22. † Ibid. xxv. 21.

*It is intended to publish the Second Sermon
on this subject in a few days.*

By the same Author.

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